

H.R. 2095 will take major steps to prevent derailments by improving track safety and grade crossing safety, increasing whistle-blower protections, setting hours of service requirements, and strongly enforcing rail safety violations.

The rail safety section of the bill includes 3 provisions that I offered through amendments in Committee and on the House floor.

The first provision would create strict training standards for all railroad employee inspectors. Railroad inspectors have expressed frustration over their lack of training curriculum. They claim that most training is on the job and from coworkers. This provision creates strong training, testing, and skills evaluation measures to ensure that inspectors are able to address critical safety defects that contribute to derailments and accidents.

The second provision would fund Operation Lifesaver for \$7 million over the next 4 years. Operation Lifesaver is a rail safety awareness program that provides public service announcements, school presentations, brochures and materials, and support for public awareness campaigns. The goal of this public education program is to end collisions, deaths, and injuries at highway-rail grade crossings and on railroad rights-of-way. The program is supported by a wide range of partners including Federal, State and local government agencies, highway safety organizations, law enforcement, and the Nation's railroads. The provision will also create a pilot program for sustained outreach in high risk areas, as defined by number of accidents and population density near the tracks.

The third provision would prohibit the Federal Government from allowing train safety inspections in Mexico from satisfying U.S. safety requirements. Railroad companies have tried multiple times to receive waivers from the Federal Government from having to perform safety inspections of trains that cross the border. Safety inspections in Mexico are much different than those performed on our side of the border and we must make sure U.S. rail safety laws are being followed.

H.R. 2095 also includes a major provision regarding the implementation of Positive Train Control (PTC) systems that is vital to ensuring that accidents such as the recent Metrolink tragedy never happen again. The bill requires all major railroads and passenger railroads to implement PTC by December 31, 2015. PTC systems have the ability to stop trains automatically before accidents occur by using switch position indicators, track integrity technology, GPS systems, and other technology. The bill also includes a grant program to assist the railroads in deploying PTC systems.

I am concerned that an important provision regarding State regulation was not included in this final bill. The State regulation provision would have ensured the original intent of Congress to give States regulatory authority to address local safety hazards.

The provision is necessary because Federal Appellate Courts have preempted every attempt by the States to implement rail safety provisions where the FRA has not acted. This was not the original intent of Congress. The Federal Railroad Safety Act as passed in 1970 says, "The States will retain the authority to regulate individual local problems where necessary to eliminate or reduce essentially local railroad safety hazards."

States and local communities cannot rely on the limited FRA resources to address their

safety concerns. States must be allowed to regulate the railroad in order to protect their property and their citizens. I hope this important safety issue will be addressed in the next Congress.

I also support the Amtrak and passenger rail section of H.R. 2095 which makes a dramatic investment in our passenger rail system that will provide jobs, strengthen the economy, and improve the environment.

The bill creates a new State Grant Program that provides \$380 million per year for intercity passenger rail. This is desperately needed in California as it has 3 of the top 5 busiest rail corridors in the U.S. These corridors include Pacific Surfliner from San Diego through Los Angeles to San Luis Obispo, the Capitol Corridor from San Francisco through Sacramento to Auburn, and the San Joaquin Corridors from Bakersfield to Oakland and Sacramento.

The bill will greatly assist the Sunset Limited, which travels through my district, by alleviating "choke points" with congestion grants and a new process for mediating disputes with freight railroads at the Surface Transportation Board (STB). It also provides funding for a High Speed Rail System which California has been working on.

The passenger rail section includes a provision I authored regarding compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the raising of station platforms. L.A. Metrolink and many other commuter railroads have fully complied with ADA rules by putting ramps and lifts in all of their stations so the disabled community can safely and easily board the trains. DOT has proposed making a rule that would require all railroad stations to fully raise their platforms to the floor level of the trains entering the station. The problem is that most passenger rail stations are serviced by multiple railroad companies with different train sets. Raising the platform could create major vertical and horizontal gaps between the trains and the platform. This would make it harder for the disabled community to safely and efficiently enter and exit trains. The provision I authored requires Amtrak to study how raising station platforms will affect the safe and efficient boarding of trains for all passengers.

Madam Speaker, I strongly support passage of H.R. 2095, this very important railroad safety and passenger rail bill. I thank the Chairman for shepherding this bill through the legislative process.

ELDER ABUSE VICTIMS ACT OF 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. RAHM EMANUEL

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, September 22, 2008

Mr. EMANUEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 5352, the Elder Abuse Victims Act of 2008.

This bipartisan legislation increases prosecutions by providing technical, investigative, coordination, and victim assistance resources to law enforcement to support elder justice cases. Additionally, it also provides grants for training, technical assistance, policy development, multidisciplinary coordination and other types of support to local prosecutors handling elder justice—related cases.

Elder abuse is a silent but widespread problem: reports reveal that 500,000 to 5 million senior Americans will be victims of some form of abuse every year, causing illness, suffering, and premature death. In my home state of Illinois, reports to the Illinois Elder Abuse and Neglect Program increased by 48% between 1997 and 2005.

Few pressing social issues have been as systematically ignored as elder abuse. Over the past 25 years, Congress passed comprehensive bills to address child abuse and crimes against women, yet there is not one full-time Federal employee working on elder abuse in the entire Federal Government.

A comparison of federal money spent to fight abuse and neglect shows that less than 2 percent of federal dollars spent on abuse and neglect goes toward elder abuse. In addition, no federal law has yet been enacted that adequately and comprehensively addresses the issues of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Since my election to Congress, I have been working with my colleagues Rep. PETER KING and Senators JOHN BREAUX, ORRIN HATCH and BLANCHE LINCOLN to pass the Elder Justice Act to protect vulnerable seniors. I am glad the bill before us, the Elder Abuse Victims Act includes many of the crucial law enforcement provisions of the Elder Justice Act. This bill is the first step to understanding—and therefore eradicating—elder abuse.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Pennsylvania for including these crucial provisions in his legislation and I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for H.R. 5352, the Elder Abuse Victims Act.

PAUL WELLSTONE AND PETE DOMENICI MENTAL HEALTH PARITY AND ADDICTION EQUITY ACT OF 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. BETTY MCCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

Ms. McCOLLUM of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 6983, the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act. It is long past time that the 54 million Americans suffering from mental illness have access to the care they need, and we cannot afford another day to go by.

This legislation is named in tribute to the late Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone whose work on this issue was groundbreaking. I also rise to thank my colleague from Minnesota, Congressman JIM RAMSTAD, for his courage in sharing his experience with substance abuse and his hard work on this legislation. Without his dedication and perseverance, we would not be at this critical moment.

We have all been affected in some way—ourselves, a family member, a friend, or colleague—by mental health or substance abuse. This is an issue I hear about in my district a lot and I thank my constituents who have been willing to share their stories to make change.

The current system is unfair and inadequate. People should not have to forego essential treatment because of cost when care could mean improvements to their quality of life and productivity. Parents should not end